DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 334 468 CE 058 749

| | |
|---|---|
| AUTHOR | Lankard, Bettina A. |
| TITLE | Resolving Ethical Dilemmas in the Workplace: A New Focus for Career Development. ERIC Digest No. 112. |
| INSTITUTION | ERIC Clearinghouse on Adult, Career, and Vocational Education, Columbus, Ohio. |
| SPONS AGENCY | Office of Educational Research and Improvement (ED), Washington, DC. |
| REPORT NO | EDO-CE-91-112 |
| PUB DATE | 91 |
| CONTRACT | RI88062005 |
| NOTE | 3p. |
| PUB TYPE | Information Analyses - ERIC Clearinghouse Products (071) |
| EDRS PRICE | MF01/PC01 Plus Postage. |
| DESCRIPTORS | Adult Education; Career Development; Case Studies; *Controversial Issues (Course Content); *Decision Making; *Ethics; *Interprofessional Relationship; Organizational Development; *Values; Work Environment |
| IDENTIFIERS | ERIC Digests |

ABSTRACT

The diverse, multicultural population that constitutes today's work force faces ethical dilemmas on the job that bring pressures to protect their own or their company's interests, at the risk of losing their personal integrity. Employers and vocational and career development personnel are recognizing the need for decision-making and problem-solving skills that will facilitate negotiation and conflict resolution in the workplace. Conflicts arise between two or more personally held values, between personal values and those of another person or the organization, between principles and the need to achieve a desired outcome, and between two or more persons or groups to whom one has an obligation. The resolution of conflicts requires interpersonal and negotiation skills; the application of "employability skills" such as honesty, cooperation, and integrity; and the participation of all stakeholders in a situation. Ethics training should help employees (1) recognize which decisions involve ethics; (2) understand the values of all stakeholders; and (3) weigh the potential impact of various options on those values. As part of a career development curriculum, discussions and analyses of case studies, use of ethics committees and resource people, and training in critical thinking, conflict resolution, communication, group processes, and mediation skills can prepare students for the ethical dilemmas they may face in the workplace. (SK)

**********
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
**********

ED334468

DIGEST
NO. 112
1991

ERIC Clearinghouse on Adult, Career, and Vocational Education

# Resolving Ethical Dilemmas in the Workplace: A New Focus for Career Development

by Bettina A. Lankard

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

EDO-CE-91-112

The changing nature of the workplace is propelling ethics training to institutional priority. Today's work force is composed of people who are more diverse than ever in nationality, culture, religion, age, education, and socioeconomic status. These people enter the work force with differing backgrounds, values, goals, and perceptions of acceptable behaviors. Many of them have career expectations that will be difficult, if not impossible, to realize in today's society. This diverse, multicultural population of workers is being asked to work together in a spirit of cooperation and respect for the good of the organization and the public they serve. However, on the job, workers face decisions that have implications for their job security, their salaries, and the success of their employing organizations--decisions that bring pressures for them to protect their own interests, sometimes at the risk of losing their personal and corporate integrity. "There's more pressure on people in organizations than there ever has been to do more with less and adjust quickly to changes. In response to that pressure, people may cut corners . . . may engage in expedient but questionable behavior" (Kirrane 1990, p. 55).

Some issues facing society and business include downsizing of staff, pollution control, disposal of toxic waste, depletion and allocation of scarce resources, cost containment, changes in law and technology, employee rights, discrimination against women and minorities, and product safety. Issues such as these are complex and they create ethical dilemmas that are difficult to resolve. In the medical field, for example, new technology has created new problems or dilemmas for which there are no easy solutions. The following are examples of these dilemmas:

- The allocation of scarce resources (Who is selected to receive a kidney transplant?)
- The withdrawal of treatment (Under what conditions can treatment be withdrawn from a patient?)
- The use of costly resources (To what extent can expensive life-saving treatment be offered, under what conditions should it be an option, and who should assume responsibility for payment?) (Cassell 1989; Fisher and Raper 1990)

Because of the complexity of ethical dilemmas, "corporations are rushing to adopt codes of ethics. Business schools are scrambling to add ethics courses. And hundreds of consultants are being hired to put 'integrity' into corporate cultures" (Byrne 1988, p. 56). Vocational and career development personnel are recognizing the need to prepare students with higher order decision-making and problem-solving skills that will facilitate negotiation and conflict resolution in the workplace.

CE058749

## Resolving Ethical Dilemmas and Value Conflicts

Discussion, analysis, problem solving, and decision making are critical to the ethical resolution of conflicts. Four competing claims are (1) conflict between two or more personally held values; (2) conflict between personal values and the values held by another person or the organization; (3) conflict between basic principles and the need to achieve a desired outcome; and (4) conflict between two or more individuals or groups to whom one has an obligation (Kirrane 1990).

The resolution of conflict cannot rest in the hands of one or two individuals. All stakeholders in a situation must be involved--for legal as well as ethical reasons. Medical decisions often involve a multidisciplinary team that consists of some or all of the following: patient, family, significant others, nurses, dietitians, social workers, psychologists, physical therapists, clergy, and so forth. In this way, the knowledge, opinions, and expertise of all "stakeholders" in the decisions are considered. The same principle can be applied in business, with decisions based on the expressed viewpoints of all stakeholders in a given situation--even indirect stakeholders. Potential clients should also be recognized as stakeholders because their choice to do business with a firm may be based on the firm's reputation for ethical behavior (Sonnesyn 1990).

Resolving ethical dilemmas, therefore, requires interpersonal and negotiation skills as well as the new application of employability skills--honesty, ability to work cooperatively, respect for others, pride in one's work, willingness to learn, dependability, responsibility for one's actions, integrity, and loyalty (Lankard 1987). For years, employers have sought workers with these skills and school curricula have stressed their importance for successful employment. Today, businesses are training their employees in critical thinking and conflict resolution skills required for ethical decision making. Schools are also focusing on developing students' critical thinking skills, but to date little has been published about the application of those skills in resolving potential ethical dilemmas specific to given jobs/occupations.

## Ethics Training and Its Application

All levels of workers--management to entry-level--need to recognize the factors that guide ethical behavior and develop strategies for assessing their personal and organizational ethics. Blanchard and Peale (1988) present three "ethics checks" to help individuals decide what is right:

1. **Is it legal?** Will I be violating either civil law or company policy?
2. **Is it balanced?** Is it fair to all concerned in the short term as well as the long term? Does it promote win-win relationships?
3. **How will it make me feel about myself?** Will it make me proud? Would I feel good if my decision was published in the newspaper? Would I feel good if my family knew about it? (p. 27)

The purpose of training is to make employees aware of the issues they encounter and enable them to deal with those issues in an ethical manner. Training should help employees (1) recognize which decisions involve ethics (not all decisions do); (2) understand values--the organization's, their own, and other people's; and (3) weigh the potential impact of various business options on those values (Kirrane 1990, p. 56). Ethics training is beneficial in its focus on ways to apply the organiza-

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

tion's credo or code of ethics in a business setting. Ideally, they offer a mechanism for discussion and problem solving to lead workers through the resolution of complex issues. "Actually, ethics training almost invariably pays off in better decisions and in a more committed work force" (Kirrane 1990, p. 56).

This view supports the trend noted in recent surveys. "This year's findings of *Training's* 1990 Industry Report indicate that 36.9 percent of organizations with more than 100 employees provide some type of ethics training compared with 26.6 percent in 1989 and 19.7 percent in 1988. A 1988 survey of 2,000 U.S. corporations . . . roughly mirrors *Training's* findings" (Thompson 1990, p. 84).

### Implications for School Curriculum

Training in ethical decision making is a critical part of vocational and career development. In *The Moral Dimension*, Amitai Etzioni recommends integrating ethics training and ethics discussions into the curriculum. He suggests that any decision of consequence has a moral dimension that must be considered in the decision-making process (Thompson 1990).

Discussions and analyses of case studies are particularly effective in developing ethical decision-making skills. Participating in such learning activities requires active listening, questioning techniques, verbal and nonverbal communication, and reasoning. Talking through a situation to achieve an ethical solution gives students or trainees new insights into the conflicting issues within a situation, the variety of possible options and the consequences of each, and the awareness that they, as workers, will have a personal responsibility in conflict resolution. The selection of case studies should be directed to the day-to-day dilemmas workers in a given occupation will face on the job. The problems and issues must be ones that are relevant to a given job/occupation and ones that are recognized as difficult to resolve.

Another strategy for ethics deliberation--one used frequently by business--is the initiation of organizational ethics committees. Such committees are formed to offer to management and staff objective recommendations on matters that are difficult to resolve. Some organizations have a hotline to which employees can direct their calls for help in resolving an ethical dilemma. As an educational strategy, business leaders could be invited to the classroom to form an "ethics committee" to which students can direct questions they have about ethical dilemmas they expect to encounter.

Although using case studies and resource people to bring workplace situations and experiences into the classroom are good educational strategies, students also need to receive training in critical thinking, conflict resolution, reasoning, communication (speaking and listening), and group process to prepare for the ethical deliberations they will encounter as they progress in their careers. Miller and Coady (1986) point out that today's ethical dilemmas require students to be equipped with higher order decision-making and problem-solving skills necessary to cope with increased individual responsibility for shaping their work environments and managing their career development. Mediation skills promoted by Miller and Coady (1986) include the following:

- **Assertiveness**--the ability to stand up for one's rights without infringing on the rights of others.
- **Empathetic listening**--the ability to listen to the speaker's complete message and to respond appropriately to the speaker's needs.
- **Principled negotiation**--working together to create an agreement fair to all parties, regarding the problem and not the other persons as the enemy.
- **Evaluating risk**--recognizing, evaluating, and coping with risk.

Miller and Coady also recommend that in teaching mediation skills the instructor play dual roles of facilitator and participant. As facilitator, the instructor guides the students through the learning process. As a participant, the teacher models the behavior and qualities of an ethical worker (such as showing respect for the ideas of all, a willingness to listen), demonstrating how to learn rather than instructing students in what to learn.

Critical thinking skills required for decision making and mediation skills required to implement those decisions are important to job progression and success. Most individuals will work for a number of businesses and in a number of jobs. They will be required to participate in decisions affecting both the quality of the work environment and the production process. They will need to interact with a multicultural, diverse group of coworkers to solve job-related problems that have ethical considerations. Courses that offer insight into the unique habits and practices of individuals from various cultures are necessary for the career development of all workers.

### REFERENCES


Blanchard, K., and Peale, N. V. *The Power of Ethical Management*. New York: William Morrow and Company, Inc., 1988.

Byrne, J. A. "Businesses Are Signing Up for Ethics 101." *Business Week*, February 15, 1988, pp. 56-57.

Cassell, E. J. "Ethics in Medical Education." *Journal of Continuing Education in the Health Professions* 9, no. 4 (1989): 225-228.

Fisher, M. M., and Raper, R. F. "Withdrawing and Withholding Treatment in Intensive Care. Part 1. Social and Ethical Dimensions." *Medical Journal of Australia* 153 (August 20, 1990): 217-219.

Kirrane, D. E. "Managing Values: A Systematic Approach to Business Ethics." *Training and Development Journal* 44, no. 11 (November 1990): 53-60.

Lankard, B. A. *Practice Ethical Behavior. Connections. School and Work Transitions*. Columbus: The National Center for Research in Vocational Education, The Ohio State University, 1987. (ED 288 981).

Miller, P. F., and Coady, W. T. *Vocational Ethics: Toward the Development of an Enabling Work Ethic*. Springfield: Illinois Department of Adult, Vocational, and Technical Education, 1986. (ED 288 062).

Sonnesyn, S. E., ed. "Four by Four." *Training and Development Journal* 45, no. 3 (March 1991): 29-37.

Thompson, B. L. "Ethics Training Enters the Real World." *Training* 27, no. 10 (October 1990): 82-94.



Developed with funding from the Office of Educational Research and Improvement, U.S. Department of Education, under Contract No. RI88062005. The opinions expressed do not necessarily reflect the opinions or policies of OERI or the Department. Digests may be freely reproduced.



CENTER ON EDUCATION AND TRAINING FOR EMPLOYMENT
THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY
1900 KENNY ROAD • COLUMBUS, OHIO 43210
Telephone (614) 292-4353 or (800) 848-4815